

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SES-02 SSO-00 NSCE-00 SS-15 SP-02
PM-05 INRE-00 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 NEAE-00 /045 W
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O 141316Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY SANA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5662
INFO SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY JIDDA IMMEDIATE
CHUSMTM DHAHRAN
USMTM RIYADH
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GE

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MASS, SA, YE
SUBJ: ARMS FOR YEMEN

REF: (A) SANA 3926 (DTG 111520Z AUG 78), (B) STATE 204206
(DTG 112332Z AUG 78)

BEGIN SUMMARY: WE ARE, FOR MOMENT, LYING VERY LOW IN
SANA. TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THIS UNUSUAL PERIOD OF QUIET,
THIS CABLE REFLECTS ON WHAT WENT WRONG IN OUR MILITARY
PROGRAM AND WHAT MIGHT BE DONE TO GET IT BACK ON TRACK.
END SUMMARY.

1. IN AFTERMATH OF DISAPPOINTING FAILURE TO WIN ACCEPTANCE
OF PROPOSED SECURITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM WE ARE LYING LOW
IN SANA, AS INSTRUCTIONS SUGGESTED. PM HAS CALLED IN
CHARGE FOR 14 AUGUST APPOINTMENT, AS HAS DEFORMIN
KIBSI, SO YARG SECOND THOUGHTS ON EMOTIONAL EVENTS
OF LAST WEEKEND MAY BE SURFACING. IN MEANTIME, IF WE
ARE GOING TO GET THIS PROGRAM GOING AGAIN, THE FOLLOWING
THOUGHTS MAY BE USEFUL, FIRST ABOUT THE YAR, SECOND
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ABOUT OURSELVES.

2. IT IS CLEAR WHAT YAR PRESIDENT SALIH WANTS AND WHY.
HE TOLD US TIME AND AGAIN: US AID, MASSIVE AND
SWIFT DELIVERIES, US AGREEMENTS AND DEFENSE COMMITMENTS,
ARMY IN NORTH EQUAL TO THAT IN SOUTH. THREAT FROM
SOUTH IS REAL AND TERRIBLE TO MAN WHO HAS COME TO
POWER IN AFTERMATH OF ASSASSINATION OF HIS PATRON IN
MOST SECURE OFFICE OF ARMY HEADQUARTERS. ASSASSINATION
WAS ALSO DEEPLY SHAMING INCIDENT FOR YEMENI OFFICERS.

THUS, TWO STRONGEST MOTIVES IN ARAB CHARACTER -- FEARS FOR SECURITY AND FEARS FOR HONOR -- UNDERLIE SALIH'S EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN YAR MILITARY.

3. IN PART, THESE FEARS ALSO UNDERLIE HIS INABILITY TO UNDERSTAND WHAT I AND MURRAY AND OTHERS TOLD HIM AGAIN AND AGAIN ABOUT OUR LIKELY RESPONSE. I HAVE WONDERED IN THE LAST TWO DAYS WHETHER TO REPROACH MYSELF FOR NOT BEING MORE BLUNT WITH SALIH, EVEN THOUGH I WAS DEALING WITH HIM FOR FIRST TIME AND TRYING TO FEEL MY WAY TO NEW RELATIONSHIP OF TRUST AND UNDERSTANDING. ON BALANCE, I HAVE DECIDED I DID THE RIGHT THING. I SENT HIM PLENTY OF BLUNT MESSAGES THROUGH THIRD PARTIES WHO WOULD, I KNEW, GET ACROSS THE MESSAGE THAT WE WERE NOT GOING TO PUT UP MILLIONS OF DOLLARS -- OR EVEN ANY DOLLARS -- IN MAP MONEY AND MOVE OURSELVES INTO POSITION TO CONFRONT SOVIETS DIRECTLY ACROSS NORTH-SOUTH YEMEN BORDER. HE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND BECAUSE HE IS SIMPLY TOO ETHNOCENTRIC AND SELF-CENTERED, TOO OBSESSED WITH FORCE IN POLITICS TO UNDERSTAND SOPHISTICATED USES OF DIPLOMACY AND ECONOMIC BOYCOTT AND REGIONAL COORDINATION. HE ALSO KNOWS NOTHING ABOUT USG. HE LITERALLY CANNOT BELIEVE USG CAN'T OR WON'T
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PUT UP MILLIONS IN MAP MONEY TO HELP HIM. SOMETHING ELSE BESIDES WORDS, SOMETHING LIKE OUR WALKING OUT OF TALKS THIS WEEKEND, WAS NEEDED TO LOWER EXPECTATIONS OF THIS IMPETUOUS AND INEXPERIENCED MAN.

4. I WOULD BE PREPARED TO ADMIT, ON OTHER HAND, THAT I OVERESTIMATED SAUDI INFLUENCE AND UNDERESTIMATED SALIH'S IMPETUOSITY. I THOUGHT WE COULD BRING OFF PROPOSED PROGRAM ON BASIS EXPRESSION OF WILLINGNESS TO CONSIDER ALL REQUESTS ON MIDDLE AND LONG TERM BASIS. I ALSO THOUGHT HE WOULD BE FORCED TO ACCEPT BECAUSE HE HAD NO ALTERNATIVE. SAUDIS DID TOO.

5. ON THURSDAY NIGHT SECURITY CHIEF KHAMIS TOLD EMBOFF HE HAD HEARD OF "DRUBBING" WHICH YEMENIS WERE GIVING US-SAUDI TEAM. HE SHOOK HIS HEAD IN WONDER. "PRESIDENT EXPECTS TO GIVE AN ORDER AND HAVE SQUADRONS OF AIRCRAFT FLY IN. HE GIVES ME ORDERS THAT ARE EQUALLY IMPOSSIBLE."

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FM AMEMBASSY SANA

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6. BUT EXPLANATION FOR WHAT HAPPENED GOES BEYOND ONE OR TWO JUDGEMENTS WHICH THIS EMBASSY OR SALIH MAY HAVE MADE. THERE WERE OTHER ACTORS IN PLAY, PRINCIPALLY SOVIET TRAINED OFFICERS WHO SERVE AS CHIEF OF STAFF, DEPUTY CHIEF AND AIR FORCE COMMANDER. THESE MEN ARE NOT PRO-SOVIET. THEY ARE NATIONALISTS. THEY RECOGNIZE THREAT WHICH SOVIET UNION POSES TO SANA REGIME AND ARE PREPARED TO SET ASIDE THE AFFECTION AND RESPECT WHICH THEY ACQUIRED FOR USSR IN YEARS OF TRAINING AND SERVICE WITH SOVIET ARMS WHEN REPUBLIC AND REVOLUTION IN YEMEN WAS FIGHTING FOR ITS LIFE. WHAT THEY WANT, HOWEVER, IS VERY SIMPLE: EQUALLY GOOD SUPPLY OF WEAPONS AND DEMONSTRATION OF BONA FIDES OF ANY STATE WHICH PROPOSES TO REPLACE SOVIETS. THEY DON'T WANT TO MOVE, AS THEY SEE IT, FROM PERFIDIOUS SOVIETS TO PERFIDIOUS AMERICANS. THESE MEN ARE CRITICAL OF SALIH, WHO TOLD ALI MUSALLIM AFTER BREAKDOWN OF TALKS THAT HE WOULD BE BETTER OFF POLITICALLY WITH NOTHING RATHER THAN PROGRAM WHICH HIS OFFICERS FOUND UNSATISFACTORY.

7. WHAT THIS MEANS IS THAT QUESTION OF ALI INEXPERIENCE
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IN ASSESSING HIS CHANCE IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS MUST BE SEEN WITHIN CONTEXT OF SOME VERY HARD DECISIONS ON HIS PART ABOUT HIS CHANCES IN DOMESTIC AFFAIRS.

8. IT MUST ALSO BE CLEAR TO READERS OF VOLUMINOUS TRAFFIC ON YAR ARMS THAT WE WERE OFFERING PRETTY MEAGER PROGRAM. WE WOULD NOT HAVE HAD TO TALK ABOUT "SELLING" IT WERE THE OFFER MORE GENEROUS. FOUR F-5B'S WITH NOTHING SAID ABOUT FOLLOW-ON F-5E'S IS NOT REALLY IMPRESSIVE. FIFTY MACHINEGUNS AND SOME BATTALION LEVEL MORTARS ARE SMALL BEERS. THE VULCANS AND THE RADARS WERE MORE ATTRACTIVE, I THINK, BUT WITH LOTS OF RPG ROCKETS ON HAND, THE LAW'S WERE UNAPPEALING. READERS SHOULD NOTE THAT THIS TIME, FOR THE FIRST TIME, SAUDIS ASKED US TO DO MORE THAN WE WERE WILLING TO DO, RATHER THAN OTHER WAY AROUND. THEY MUST HAVE

BEEN PARTICULARLY BAFFLED BY OUR REFUSAL TO PROVIDE DRAGONS WHEN, AT OUTSET OF PROGRAM IN 1976, THEY WERE APPROVED.

9. I SHOULD ADD THAT, AS BEST I CAN UNDERSTAND MATTER, YEMENIS MISREAD OUR OFFER OF TRAINING TEAMS WHEN THERE WAS SO LITTLE EQUIPMENT. THEY WANTED TEAMS BUT THEY THOUGHT, AND SAID, THAT OUR CONCERN SEEMED TO BE TO SCORE POINTS HERE BY REPLACING SOVIETS WITHOUT PROVIDING YAR ANY-THING MUCH IN RETURN. THEY GOT MADDEST AT THOUGHT THAT WE WANTED POLITICAL ADVANTAGE ON THE CHEAP. THEY FORE- SAW SOVIET ESCALATION. THEY REFUSED TO ACCEPT IDEA THAT FEW US TRAINING TEAMS WOULD AVERT SOVIETS UNLESS ARMS WERE ALSO PROVIDED.

10. THIS INVARIABLY LED TO DISCUSSION OF THREAT, WHERE THEY HAD IDEAS WHICH WERE AS EXAGGERATED AS THEIR
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EQUIPMENT DEMANDS. I TRIED TO DEAL WITH THESE INFLATED STATEMENTS OF THREAT -- THEY SAID SOUTHERN AND FOREIGN FORCES IN PDRY NUMBERED OVER 80,000 MEN -- BY OFFERING TO DO JOINT THREAT ANALYSIS. THIS WAS NOT ENOUGH, AND ALI SHAYBA MADE CUTTING REMARKS THAT USG WAS NOT "GROWNUP" ENOUGH AND "INTELLIGENT" ENOUGH TO SEE THE DANGER FROM THE SOUTH. WHEN I SUGGESTED THAT PROBLEM WAS TO AVOID ARMS RACE, TO LOWER TENSIONS RATHER THAN ESCALATE THEM, TO MAKE SURE USSR AND US DID NOT SEE THE YEMENS AS A BATTLEGROUND, SHAYBA, WITH CHORUS FROM OTHERS, ECHOED SALIH IN REPLYING HOTLY THAT SOVIETS HAD LONG SINCE BEGUN TO INTRODUCE NEW WEAPONS, SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS, THEIR OWN FORCES, AND THOSE OF OTHERS, AND ALL IN GREAT ABUNDANCE, INTO SOUTH. SUB-VERSION AND PROPAGANDA AGAINST NORTH WAS ESTABLISHED FACT. INTERVENTION BESIDES RADICAL GROUPS IN AFRICA WAS EQUALLY ESTABLISHED. WHAT WAS NEEDED WAS COUNTER-BALANCING FORCE TO DANGEROUS SOVIET INITIATIVES AND BOLD-NESS. DIDN'T US SEE THAT?

11. YEMENI OFFICERS DON'T ALWAYS EXPRESS THEMSELVES QUITE SO CLEARLY. THEY WERE MORE INSULTING THAN ANALYTICAL ON THURSDAY AND FRIDAY, IN FACT. IT MADE FOR HARD GOING.

12. ((GENERAL CATHEY, INCIDENTALLY, COMPORTED HIMSELF WITH GREAT SKILL AND CALM AND TENACITY UNDER FIRE. I FELT MORE THAN ONCE (AND SAID SO) THAT THIS FINE OFFICER WOULD HAVE MADE AN OUTSTANDING MARINE.))

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13. WE HAVE DISTILLED SEVERAL QUESTIONS FROM THE OBSERVATIONS ABOVE. THESE QUESTIONS WILL HAVE TO BE ANSWERED AS PART OF ANY EFFORT TO GET THE PROGRAM IN YEMEN GOING AGAIN.

14. THE FIRST QUESTION CONCERNS THE LONG RANGE IMPACT IN THE PENINSULA OF MASSIVE SOVIET MILITARY DELIVERIES TO SOUTH YEMEN AND ETHIOPIA.

15. SECOND QUESTION WE MUST ASK OURSELVES IS WHETHER WE WANT TO AND CAN CONTEST THE SOVIETS IN THIRD WORLD CONFLICTS WHERE ARMS SHIPMENTS ARE A MAJOR FACTOR. WE SEEM TO HAVE TIED OURSELVES UP IN GOVERNMENTAL AND IDEOLOGICAL KNOTS ABOUT US ARMS DELIVERIES AND WE MAY HAVE CONVINCED OURSELVES THAT THE SOVIETS WILL RESPOND TO REASONABLE INDUCEMENTS AND PLACE LIMITS ON THEIR BEHAVIOR ABROAD.

16. THIRD QUESTION IS WHETHER WE WANT TO DO MUCH LESS HERE THAN THE SAUDIS WANT US TO DO. FOR ONCE, ON YEMEN ARMS, THE SAUDIS WERE WAY OUT AHEAD OF US.

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BEFORE THIS LAST WEEKEND THEY WANTED F-5E DELIVERIES AT AN EARLY DATE AND DRAGONS AND REDEYES, SUPPORT FOR NAVY, SHOW OF FORCE. THEY NOW WANT US TO DO EVEN MORE -- PROVIDE TANKS, M-113'S AND C-130'S. REALIZE THAT SIZING OUR ARMS AID HERE IS DIFFICULT ISSUE. I HAVE ALREADY MADE MISTAKE ABOUT WHAT WAS NEEDED AS FIRST STEP, AND DON'T WANT AT THIS POINT TO MAKE ANY RECOMMENDATIONS ON PARTICULAR PIECES OF EQUIPMENT, BUT I THOUGHT WE WOULD COME TO QUESTIONS OF EXTRA EQUIPMENT VERY SOON, AS PART OF DISCUSSING MID-TERM PROGRAM WE PROMISED. MAYBE WE SHOULD DO IT NOW, HOWEVER, LEST SMALL SIZE OF OUR

PROGRAM DISPROVE WHAT WE SET OUT TO PROVE; THAT WE CAN
PROVIDE GOOD AID TO FRIENDS IN NEED.
RANSOM

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